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PASADENA STAR-NEWS

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 18, 1997

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11 to join in toxics suit against JPL

By Robin Lloyd
STAFF WRITER

LA CANADA FLINTRIDGE — Eleven area residents soon will join in a lawsuit with three plaintiffs who claim that toxic chemicals caused by the Jet

Propulsion Laboratory caused Hodgkin's disease and other illnesses, attorneys said Tuesday.

JPL, an arm of NASA and the federal government, also has filed documents to hold the U.S. government accountable in the lawsuit if it loses the case, attorneys said.

Officials from JPL have vowed to fight the lawsuit, filed in January, and questioned the link between the plaintiffs' diseases and chemicals the laboratory admits to dumping in the 1940s and '50s.

The original four plaintiffs include Glendale resident Anita

Salvo, whose daughter Francesca died of Hodgkin's disease at age 24 in 1989. The mother is suing for wrongful death.

Francesca Salvo also is a plaintiff, along with Ramona Higley and Tamara Vallier.

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SUIT Cancer link claimed

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both of Sunland, who have Hodgkin's disease and were Salvo's schoolmates at St. Bede Catholic School in the 1970s about a mile downhill from JPL.

One of the residents expected to be added to the lawsuit under an agreement between attorneys for both sides will allege he came into contact with contaminated water while a resident of Pasadena, said attorney Clifford Pearson, who represents the plaintiffs.

The new plaintiffs also will claim that water contaminated with degreasing solvents caused Hodgkin's disease and other cancers, Pearson said.

JPL, now managed by Caltech, was placed on the Superfund National Priority List in 1993. Studies are trying to determine the extent of the laboratory's responsibility for the dumping and whether more remedial action is necessary, said Charles Buri, manager of JPL's environmental affairs office.

Pasadena authorities started testing for volatile organic compounds in city water in 1980, and one of those — trichloroethylene — was detected in a city-run water well on Jan. 11, 1980, said Brad Boman, principal engineer for water quality and supply at the Pasadena Water and Power Department.

In 1985 and 1986, the city stopped using wells near the Arroyo Seco because toxic levels exceeded maximums set by state Health Department, he said. In 1990, the Devil's Gate Groundwater Treatment Plant began operation in the Arroyo Seco to strip chemicals from water near dumping pits used in the 1940s and 1950s, when the JPL was operated by the U.S. Army.

JPL workers poured chemicals down sinks that drained into cesspools around the lab — a common practice at the time.

Pasadena's water — about 40 percent of which comes from local wells — currently is safe, Boman said.